United Nations A/AC.109/2104

General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 May 1998

Original: English

Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

American Samoa

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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I. General

1. American Samoa,[1] a Non-Self-Governing Territory of the United States of America, is located in the South Pacific approximately 3,700 kilometres south-west of Hawaii and 4,350 kilometres north-east of Australia. It consists of six islands (Tutuila, Aunuu, Ofu, Olosega, Tau and Rose) belonging to the Samoan group. Swains Island, 340 kilometres north of Tutuila, is administered as an integral part of American Samoa. The total land area of the Territory is 197 square kilometres, about 70 per cent of which is covered by dense forest. Lying near the Equator, between 13° and 16° S, American Samoa has a typical tropical climate with a wet and a dry season. Pago Pago, the capital and the site of one of the Pacific's greatest natural harbours, is located on Tutuila, the largest of the islands, where 90 per cent of the population lives.

2. The Government of America Samoa estimated the total population in July 1995, at 56,350, up 2.9 per cent from 54,760 in 1994 and up 20.5 per cent from 1990, when the decennial census put the total population at 46,773. During the period from 1990 to 1995, the population grew at an annual rate of 3.8 per cent, one of the highest growth rates in the Pacific Islands and the world. At that rate, the total population will reach 67,900 in the year 2000, exceeding the Territorial Government's estimate of 63,110 by more than 7.5 per cent. The latest official government estimate of the population of American Samoa in mid-October 1997 was 59,600.[2] Some of this population increase is attributable to immigration: the standard of living in American Samoa is higher than that of most of its neighbours and it therefore attracts job seekers from neighbouring countries, in particular from the independent State of Samoa, whose nationals often have family members in the Territory.[3] Rapid population growth places a strain on the public infrastructure and on the ability of the Government of American Samoa to provide necessary services. The current population density is estimated at approximately 234 persons per square kilometre, an average figure for the South Pacific. Over 88 per cent of the residents of the Territory are ethnically Samoan.[4] Approximately 70,000 Samoans live in the United States, 20,000 of them in Hawaii.[5]

3. Anyone born in American Samoa is a United States national and is entitled to a modified United States passport. The only substantial legal difference between a citizen and a national is that the latter, as a non-citizen, cannot vote in United States elections.

II. Constitutional and political developments

4. Information on constitutional and political developments in the Territory remained as reported in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 4-9). Since January 1981, American Samoa has elected by direct vote a non-voting delegate to the United States House of Representatives. The current delegate, Mr. Eni F. H. Faleomavaega, was re-elected in November 1996.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

5. American Samoa suffers from the same economic constraints, such as geographical isolation and scarce resources, common to most island societies in the South Pacific. Its economy depends on the tuna fish canning industry. Prospects for agricultural development are limited owing to the small amount of land suitable for cultivation. With respect to other industries, the Territory's manufacturing and industrial assembly is small for the time being but is potentially an important source of income, especially if the Government is able to attract more businesses to the Territory. In that connection, a new garment factory, owned and managed by a privately held American investor group in California, opened in 1996. The factory makes brand-name clothes for the United States market and benefits from the duty-free entry of its products into the United States, which makes them competitive even with garments manufactured where labour costs are lower.

6. The establishment of such businesses translates into gains for American Samoa in wages, salaries and taxes, and the usual secondary benefits of creating work for suppliers and various service providers. The services segment of the economy, apart from government services, comprises mostly trade, both wholesale and retail. Recently a "wholesale retailing" operation (Cost U Less) and the first cinema opened in the Territory (the cinema is owned by a Hawaii-based operator). Whereas the relative success of these mass retailers suggests levels of income and discretionary spending of American Samoans that are higher than those of a typical small developing economy, at the same time official government statistics indicate that the majority of American Samoans live in poverty according to United States income standards. Nevertheless, estimated per capita

income in the Territory ($5,000) is about twice the average for all the Pacific island economies (at $2,700), although it is only one quarter of the per capita income in Guam,[6] another Non-Self-Governing Territory administered by the United States.

7. In 1994, the latest year for which official government figures are available, exports amounted to $252.2 million and imports totalled $497.8 million, resulting in a trade deficit of $245.6 million. The largest trading partner of American Samoa remains the United States, followed by New Zealand, Australia and Fiji. Imports are mainly food (22 per cent) and petroleum products (17 per cent), machine parts, building materials, textiles and clothing; canned tuna accounts for 97 per cent of exports.[7]

B. Public service

8. According to the *American Samoa Economic Report* of April 1997, prepared by the Bank of Hawaii, the Government of American Samoa continued to be one of the largest employers in the Territory. In March 1995 it employed 4,281 workers,[6] a slight decrease from 4,300 in 1994[8] but still representing 33 per cent of the Territory's workforce. The average annual payroll cost to the Government was $14,680 per worker in 1995, including benefits. Apart from its usual responsibilities, the Government also manages power, water and sewer systems through the American Samoa Power Authority.

9. The main business of the Government is the management and distribution of federal income and capital subsidies. Civil service workers enjoy the highest wage rates in the Territory, making Government work by far the most attractive job option for American Samoans. Many American Samoans with advanced degrees from the United States return to the Territory to work for the Government. A number of expatriates also work for the Government, especially in areas such as financial services where local expertise is scarce.

10. The Territorial Government is a government with no local or municipal sublevels. The Government is highly centralized and performs all basic government functions, but its role goes well beyond the provision of basic public services such as police protection and public infrastructure. Its roots lie in the traditional communal system where leaders are responsible not only for preserving social order but for the extended family's economic welfare as well.[6]

C. Public finance

11. In a statement to the Fono in January 1998, Governor Tauese Sunia stated that the Government's indebtedness included long-term debts of $32 million. Among those debts were loans obtained from the Retirement Fund and over $14 million owed to the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is seeking repayment for funds originally earmarked for other uses but then utilized by the Government to carry out projects to alleviate the consequences from Hurricanes Tusi, Ofa and Val. As at 30 September 1997, the Government's total debt stood at $55 million, including a spending overrun of more than $6 million in the last fiscal year. Government indebtedness also included short-term debts of $22.8 million, owed mostly to medical suppliers and health-care providers, and much of it is made up of costs pertaining to off-island medical referrals.[9] Addressing the precarious financial situation of the Territorial Government, the Governor said that the Government had access to $4 million in revenue generated from excise taxes specifically passed by the Fono to pay off the Government's debts.

12. The Government is taking stringent measures aimed at collecting taxes due from local businesses in order to alleviate the Territory's deficit. During 1997 more than 500 such businesses received warnings from the Treasurer's office that their business licences would not be renewed in 1998 unless they paid their taxes. According to the Treasurer, estimated unpaid corporate income taxes for 1996 constituted $10 million.[10]

D. Land tenure and agriculture

13. Basic information on land tenure and agriculture is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 13-15). A total of 7,277 acres of land was registered with the Territorial Registrar in 1994. About 23 per cent was designated government-owned, 25 per cent communal or native, 25 per cent individually owned land, 14 per cent registered for freehold owners and 14 per cent as church land.[11]

E. Fisheries

14. In 1994, there were 44 fishing boats in the Territory and 138 fishermen; over 300,000 pounds of fish were caught (compared with only 84,000 pounds in 1993).[12] In October 1997, the first long-line fishing boat owned and operated by

American Samoa was put into operation, allowing it to compete with foreign long-line fishing vessels.[13]

F. Industry

15. Information on American Samoa's tuna-processing industry is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 16-18).

16. In July 1997, one of the Territory's two canneries, the Samoa Packing Tuna Cannery, along with its California-based parent company, Van Camp Seafood, was sold to Tri-Union for $92 million. The three shareholders of Tri-Union are Thai Union (50 per cent), the largest seafood cannery in Asia; Tri-Marine International, one of the largest tuna trading companies in the world; and Edward Gann, an independent United States flag tuna purse-seine boat owner and operator.[14] Another tuna cannery, StarKist Samoa, was contemplating expanding American Samoa's plant to handle an increased volume of fish in connection with the closure of its plant in Puerto Rico.[15]

17. Other industrial activities in American Samoa are mostly service-oriented. There are a number of small factories processing soap, perfume and alcohol. In 1994, there were 2,188 registered businesses in the Territory, a drop of 3.8 per cent from 1993, of which retail trade accounted for 874, wholesale trade for 281, service establishments for 480 and transportation for 356 businesses.[16]

18. According to news reports, two local investors were interested in setting up food-processing plants in the Territory. Research conducted by the Territorial Department of Commerce found that there was a ready and large export market in the region for food products and had asked both investors, who are American Samoans, to submit business plans.[17] In another development, a garment manufacturer from Fiji has expressed interest in setting up operations in American Samoa. According to the Territory's Lieutenant-Governor, the Fijian company also wanted to sell its clothing on the local market. Attracting new industries and creating new employment opportunities continued to be top priorities for the Territorial Government.[18]

G. Transport and communications

19. There are approximately 150 kilometres of paved roads and 200 kilometres of secondary roads in American Samoa. In 1994, there were 5,245 registered vehicles, of which 89 per cent were privately owned. There is a non-scheduled bus service.

20. Information on sea links and shipping companies is contained in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 22 and 23, and A/AC.109/2044/Add.1, paras. 41-44).

21. In 1994, a total of 918 vessels entered American Samoa, including fishing boats, freighters, yachts and cruise ships.

22. Pago Pago International Airport is regularly served by a number of airlines, which link American Samoa with Hawaii and the United States mainland, as well as with Australia, New Zealand and other countries in the South Pacific. In 1994, the total number of aircraft operations reported at the Pago Pago International Airport was 12,078.[19]

23. American Samoa, through the overseas Communications Satellite corporate link, has direct dialling to most countries. In 1994, the Territory had 8,950 telephones, as well as 6 telex and 400 facsimile subscribers.[20]

24. There are several weekly newspapers in the Territory in both the English and the Samoan languages. There is also a daily newspaper, the *Samoa News*.

H. Water system and utilities

25. Information on the water system and utilities is contained in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2044/Add.1, paras. 29-35, and A/AC.109/2080, para. 19). Water meters increased in 1994 by almost 2 per cent as more homes were connected to the government water system. Gross electricity produced in the Territory in 1994 was 125 million kilowatt-hours, an increase of about 2.5 per cent from 1993.[21]

I. Tourism

26. Information on tourism is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2080, para. 20).

J. Financial institutions

27. Information on financial institutions in American Samoa is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2044, paras. 16 and 17).

IV. Social conditions

A. Labour

28. Information on the labour force in the Territory is contained in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 30 and 31, and A/AC.109/2044, para. 20). The labour force in the Territory, which has been steadily increasing since 1980, numbered 16,822 workers in 1994. The two largest employers are the Government and the two tuna canneries, which together provide approximately 65 per cent of the jobs.

B. Immigration

29. Information on immigration is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 32 and 33). Early in 1997, American Samoa's Governor announced an amnesty for illegal immigrants who had arrived in the Territory before 1 January 1997 if they applied for permanent resident status. In September 1997, over 2,300 residents participated in the Governor's amnesty programme, of whom a majority (1,820) were from neighbouring Samoa.

C. Public health

30. Information on the public health is contained in a previous working paper (A/AC.109/2080, paras. 26-28).

31. The main hospital in the Territory, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Tropical Medical Center, has 140 beds and a staff of 25 physicians. Medical, dental and pharmaceutical services are available 24 hours a day at minimal cost to residents and visitors. For serious cases, off-island treatment, including hospitalization in Guam, Hawaii or the United States mainland, is provided free of charge.

32. As was mentioned above, a significant part of the Government's indebtedness is related to costs associated with off-island medical referrals (see para. 11). In December 1997, medical officials in the United States-affiliated Pacific islands, including American Samoa, received access to a new Internet Web service at the Tripler Regional Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, to facilitate medical referrals and patient consultations. The secure Web site is open to physicians and other medical personnel in the United States-administered Territories of American Samoa and Guam.[22]

33. In 1994, out-patient visits to the Center totalled 140,345, an increase of about 2 per cent from the 1993 figure. The emergency room continued to receive the most visits (42 per cent), followed by paediatric and dental clinics.

34. In view of the problems between the present territorial administration and the Fono regarding the establishment of the American Samoa Hospital Authority reported in a previous working paper (see A/AC.109/2080, paras. 26 and 27), the Governor established a five-member hospital governing board to manage the medical centre in order to release funds frozen by the federal Government until American Samoa established a hospital authority with rate-setting authorization. The funding freeze was ordered by the United States Congress in 1996. The United States Health Care Financing Administration provides about $3 million a year to Lyndon Baines Johnson Tropical Medical Center (about 16 per cent of all funding) and most of those funds are used to purchase most of the medicine and medical supplies used at the Medical Center.[23]

35. In September 1997, a dental health programme was launched in American Samoa's schools to combat tooth decay. A 1995 survey found that the Territory had the highest incidence of tooth decay among 12-year-olds in the South Pacific region. The new dental health programme will cover all public and private kindergartens and elementary schools.[24]

D. Crime and crime prevention

36. In 1994, a total of 2,121 offences were reported to the police, a decline of about 12 per cent compared with 1993. The most common offences were disorderly conduct, assault, burglary, larceny, drunken driving and property damage.[25]

37. In February 1997, a new anti-drug bill was introduced in American Samoa, providing for tougher penalties for drug-related crimes. In a related development, the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, administered by the United States Department of Justice, announced in August 1997 a grant of $563,625 to the American Samoa Department of Public Safety. The grant can be used to pay 75 per cent of the cost of hiring additional officers for a three-year period.[26]

E. Housing

38. In 1994, a total of 674 land use permits were issued. There were 187 permits for new structures. Total estimated value of all construction excluding government projects was $14 million.[11]

V. Educational conditions

39. The educational system in American Samoa is broadly based on the United States pattern of eight years' attendance of elementary school and four years' enrolment in high school. In 1994, there was a total of 101 private and public educational institutions, with a total enrolment of 18,103 students.[27]

40. American Samoa Community College, established in 1970, offers two-year degree courses in arts and sciences and certificates of proficiency programmes in vocational skills, business, clerical and nursing curricula. At the end of 1994, the College had over 1,400 students.[27]

41. In June 1997, the United States Department of Education Literacy Challenge Fund awarded American Samoa a grant of $240,930 to improve computer facilities at schools. The grant will be used to provide students with CD-ROM capability and worldwide Internet access.

VI. Participation in international organizations and arrangements

42. Information on American Samoa's participation in international organizations and arrangements is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 40-43).

VII. Future status of the Territory

43. In a statement made in 1993, the Lieutenant-Governor of American Samoa indicated that American Samoa preferred to remain a Territory of the United States (see A/AC.109/1159, paras. 25-31). This position remains unchanged as of today.

44. On 8 October 1997, in his statement to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), the representative of the United States said that circumstances unique to the situation of each particular Non-Self-Governing Territory should be considered. There were various legitimate forms of self-government short of full independence that benefited the people of both the administering Power and the Non-Self-Governing Territory.

45. On 27 October 1997, in another statement made to the Fourth Committee in connection with the consideration by the Committee of a draft resolution on small Non-Self-Governing Territories, including American Samoa, the representative of the United States proposed a correction to the draft resolution. He recalled that the original consensus resolution[28] had begun with two preambular paragraphs that read:

> "*Noting* the report by the administering Power that most of the American Samoan leaders had expressed satisfaction with the island's present relationship with the United States of America"

and

> "*Noting also* the non-participation of representatives of the peoples of American Samoa in the last two regional seminars".

In his view, given the importance of recognizing the point of view of the people of the Territory, their understanding of their current situation and the evolution of their notion of self-determination, he felt it important to maintain the original two preambular paragraphs, which took into account the views of the American Samoan leaders.

46. On 3 November 1997, the Rapporteur of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples proposed revisions to the draft resolution on small Non-Self-Governing Territories, which, *inter alia*, included the aforementioned corrections proposed by the representative of the United States with regard to the section on American Samoa. At the same meeting, the omnibus draft resolution on small territories was approved by the Fourth Committee without a vote, as orally revised.[29]

47. On 10 December 1997, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 52/77, a consolidated resolution on 10 Non-Self-Governing Territories, section I of which is devoted specifically to American Samoa.[30]

Notes

[1] The information contained in the present working paper was derived from published sources.

[2] *American Samoa Economic Report (Bank of Hawaii)* (herein after "*ASER*"), April 1997, p. 12.

[3] *Samoa News*, 15 October 1997.

[4] *ASER*, April 1997.

[5] *American Samoa Statistical Digest* (hereinafter "*ASSD*"), 1995, p. 41.

[6] *ASER*, April 1997, p. 13.

[7] *ASSD*, 1995, p. 195 (table 14.4).

[8] Ibid., p. 137.

[9] *Samoa News*, 13 January 1998.

[10] *PACNEWS*, 7 September 1997.

[11] *ASSD*, 1995, p. 91.

[12] Ibid., p. 173.

[13] Pacific Islands Development Project, PIDP/CPIS, 14 October 1997.

[14] *Samoa News*, 11 July 1997.

[15] Ibid., 28 September 1997.

[16] *ASSD*, 1995, p. 205.

[17] *Samoa News*, 1 November 1997.

[18] Ibid., 26 October 1997.

[19] *ASSD*, 1995, p. 161.

[20] Ibid., p. 162.

[21] Ibid., p. 212.

[22] *PIDP/CPIS*, 24 December 1997.

[23] *Samoa News*, 2 and 13 September 1997.

[24] *PACNEWS*, 28 September 1997.

[25] *ASSD*, 1995, pp. 74 and 75.

[26] *Samoa News*, 26 August 1997.

[27] *ASSD*, 1995, p. 59.

[28] General Assembly resolution 51/224.

[29] See A/C.4/52/SR.6, 7, 9 and 11.

[30] See A/52/PV.69 and General Assembly resolution 52/77.